

NEW HAMPSHIRE COMPANY “SOOTHES” CUSTOMERS WORLDWIDE

Back in 1993, New Hampshire carpenter William F. Whyte (a.k.a. “Badger Bill”) suffered from cracked fingers for the last time. For years, working outside in the harsh New England winter weather had taken its toll on his hands and he sought a cure. Fortunately, Whyte also dabbled with herbs and natural remedies in his spare time. He concocted a soothing formula involving a mixture of beeswax and olive oil, generously applied it to his painful, bleeding fingers, and Badger Healing Balm was born in his kitchen.

“It worked so well that I felt I could sell it to sore-fingered people everywhere,” said Whyte. It turns out he wasn’t too far-off in his assessment. After a little additional research and development of the concept, formula and packaging, in the fall of 1995 Whyte began selling Badger Balm to local hardware stores in south western New Hampshire. Initial response to the balm was very positive, but, he needed help. The start-up, home-based business was financed by loans and labor from his family and friends and Whyte’s kitchen was turning into quite a mess, so he turned to Paul Bothwell of SCORE, a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), for advice and guidance.

“We had several meetings with Bill and helped him work through his early problems involving marketing, manufacturing, incorporation and cash flow,” said Bothwell. “We referred him to an accountant and helped him develop a solid business plan.” Bothwell and his SCORE colleagues also assisted Whyte in obtaining a \$50,000 SBA guaranteed loan to get the business rolling.

Badger’s distribution quickly expanded beyond local New Hampshire hardware stores. Through lots of hard work, and a little luck, Whyte was able to grow his business and expand his product line. In 1999, Badger won the coveted “Best Product Award” at ExTracts, an international trade show for aromatherapy, cosmetics and personal care held at the Jacob Javits center in New York City. Today Badger products consist of more than 30 balms, potions and natural remedies which are sold world-wide. Recently Badger introduced a new line of all natural soaps. Badger can still be found in the local hardware store, but it can also be purchased across the country, internationally and on the web. Badger has established distribution with several major retail chains as well.

Early on Whyte established a set of principles by which he operates his business. Over the years he has faithfully adhered to these principles and he continues to give back to society. Badger company policy is to give 7% of profits to charity. Badger has donated to a wide variety of local and global charities each year since inception. Whyte’s higher business standards also extend to his employees. Badger offers a healthy work environment, free daily hot lunch and employee profit sharing. Whyte also ensures that all Badger products are made from natural, organic ingredients.

Whyte, a Vietnam era veteran, is also looking to give back to the organization that helped him get started. He volunteers with SCORE, the Monadnock chapter in Keene, New Hampshire. Bill provides marketing advice and guidance to aspiring entrepreneurs in the greater Monadnock region. Bill shares his experience and knowledge obtained from the “school of hard knocks”, having had no formal marketing training or professional marketing guidance.

The W.S. Badger Company is named after Whyte and his wife, Katie Schwerin and operates out of an unassuming, black-shuttered building (a.k.a. “The Badger Mines”) on Route 10 in Gilsum, New Hampshire. Today, Badger employs more than 30 people and distributes its products to every state in the U.S. It has also expanded internationally, with the largest export customers being in the UK and Holland. Badger products can even be found in one of the most famous posh department stores in the world, Harrod’s in London.

Bill was recently on “The Front Porch” with John Walters on NH public radio. Bill discussed his humble beginnings and also spoke about his desire to try to maintain the “close knit family feel” amongst his employees, as Badger continues its tremendous growth. Even though Badger has grown to a multi-million dollar company, Bill still plays wiffle ball with the employees after a company provided wholesome, organic lunch. The company shuts down for a one hour lunch each day, so that the employees are all able to refresh and rejuvenate.

Although sales in 2004 topped \$3 million, success has not gone to Whyte’s head. He can still laugh at his mistakes and also recounts how some “mistakes” turned into a stroke of genius, as was the case with Badger’s sleep balm formula. “We’re still a small-town manufacturing business with simple values,” said Whyte. His employees and thousands of his customers worldwide hope it stays that way.

For more information please visit Badger’s website at: www.badgerbalm.com.